Watco and Mid-Ship provide comprehensive logistics management

by Tracie VanBecelaere  
Managing Editor

When it comes to logistics, Watco has an aggregate of some of the most experienced players in the industry. Watco not only has dedicated and experienced team members designing logistics moves for our customers; Watco has broadened its service offering via a strategic relationship with Mid-Ship Logistics.

The companies’ relationship has been ongoing for many years, and in April of 2018, it was made official when Watco purchased an interest in Mid-Ship Group LLC. In December of 2019, Watco made another investment in Mid-Ship, purchasing a large percentage of the logistics company with a small investment in the marine division as well.

Watco SVP Sales-Logistics Lynda Patterson said, “Mid-Ship Logistics has in-depth knowledge of the inland riverway networks and barge operations in general and is well known to many customers in the barging world. Therefore, adding Mid-Ship into the mix makes a lot of sense for Watco, particularly as we have invested in a port and terminal network that barge management complements, and we have moved to offer increased modal breadth in our supply chain offerings.”

George Kachmar, Mid-Ship president, said, “Like most good partnerships, the benefits go both ways. Mid-Ship gains the added value of a large organization with the huge potential to provide end-to-end solutions for our respective customer base and new customers. Mid-Ship provides Watco with a Marine transportation solution to combine with Terminal handling, trucking, and rail. Watco and Mid-Ship are individually strong but unbeatable as a team.”

Although the Watco and Mid-Ship partnership may be fairly new, Mid-Ship has been around for quite some time. The company was started in 1974, primarily focusing on ocean chartering, and consisting of non-containerized ship brokerage-chartering. In 1991 they added the logistics division, which handles the logistics of everything except ocean chartering, planning the movement of cargo from vessel to the point of rest. Mid-Ship is a non-asset-based company that coordinates services and manages providers on behalf of their rich customer base. The services managed include stevedoring, surveying, trucking, rail, and barging. Mid-Ship can handle all facets of the move or just the pieces that the customer needs handled.

The Mid-Ship logistics group is comprised of about 35 team members who work out of four locations across the U.S., and the headquarters are located in Port Washington, New York. The Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, location manages truckload activity; New Orleans, Louisiana, team members focus on barge operations; and the Houston Texas, group, provides in-house logistics management services for Kinder Morgan along with other clients. The Port Washington team oversees all activity including barge management. Mid-Ship manages the ocean movement (via Mid-Ship Marine), extends into the interior U.S. via barge and truck moves executed by Mid-Ship Logistics, which utilizes Watco Logistics to provide additional truck depth and rail sector expertise. The cargo that Mid-Ship moves is mostly non-containerized products such as steel and industrial bulk. The benefit of using the logistics services is they can move cargo from door-to-door, offering a one-call end-to-end solution with one consolidated invoice.

One good example of how the Watco and Mid-Ship teams work together is when a large industrial customer of Mid-Ship needed an off-site location to store their bulk raw material. Mid-Ship and Watco teamed up to identify a location that was easily accessible, able to handle the product, and then capable of unloading barges and then reloading back to barge once it was ready to be shipped out. Watco’s Vicksburg, Mississippi, terminal stored the product on-site and then was able to ship 22,000 tons of cargo via barge to New Orleans, where it was transloaded from barge to ship and then delivered to the East Coast of Mexico.

Although the relationship gives the logistics

The combined logistics teams at Watco and Mid-Ship are composed of experts in supply chain management utilizing a variety of transportation modes including barge, truck, and rail, as well locating warehousing and managing inventory.

teams more ways to utilize Watco resources, they will only do so when it makes good business sense for their customers.

“In the end,” Kachmar said, “we are going to do what is in the best interest of the customer. Of course, we first see if we can use a Watco facility in the logistics plan, but we need to present all options to the customer.”
Team members receive February Winter Freeze bonuses

by Tracie VanBecelaere
Managing Editor

While congratulating our team members for their near miss catches and safety suggestions, it would be remiss not to mention all of the team members who have been performing their day-to-day duties and working to ensure that their environments are a safe one during the pandemic we are going through right now. Staying focused is imperative, both for our own safety and also for our customers, who rely on us as critical infrastructure team members who are keeping America moving during this challenging time.

The 2019-2020 Winter Freeze Safety program has come to an end. However, a focus should continue on reporting near misses and submitting safety suggestions for continuous improvement of safety practices at all locations. Congratulations to the team members for their attention to detail and reporting what they had noticed.

John Staples, at the Ghent terminal in Kentucky, was loading a basket for our customer when he noticed a pin was coming out of the clam shell of the customer’s basket. Had John not caught it, a piece of the clam shell could’ve fallen while traveling to the furnace or directly into the furnace. Good catch, John!

At the Cahokia terminal, an operator went onto the dock to repair a broken steam line, while Kaleb Biffar, from coal operations, was watching from above (the buddy system). The operator on the dock forgot to turn off the steam valve and asked Kaleb to turn it off. He used his Stop Work Authority because he wasn’t trained in liquid operations and wanted to be sure that the procedure was handled correctly.

David George, at the Middleport, Ohio, terminal submitted a safety suggestion to his customer to help keep their team safe. While at a customer’s site he noticed the flip-down ladder system used by the loader to access the top of trailers would not stay in the down position. The loader ties to the ladder system with fall protection, and this creates a risk that the ladder will flip up and pull the operator from the top of the trailer. It’s nice to see that our team is continually watching out for the safety of not only their team, but ensuring everyone interacts safely.

Rose Oljace caught that a customer had released the incorrect bundle lengths. She noticed the customer of the discrepancy, and Rose noted there was another bundle that would best fit the weight request but a different length. This resulted in a grateful customer and a satisfied end-user. A $500 savings was derived from not having to return the wrong material and redeliver the correct material.

At the Tioga, North Dakota, terminal, team member Shane Bengson exercised Stop Work Authority when a driver exited his truck without donning proper PPE. The team member notified the shift lead and supervisor, who then informed the truck driver of the PPE requirements for the area. The truck driver donned the proper equipment, and the unloading and loading operation resumed.

Dave Mathews at the Omaha, Nebraska, terminal was inspecting contractors’ work on the heating system in the blast staging area. He noticed a foul smell that caused his eyes to water and immediately notified leadership and secured the facility so no one else could enter. Further inspection of the facility found the repaired heating system was not venting properly. The team performed lockout and tag-out on the system and contacted the contractor responsible for repairs.

Richard Wampler, at the South Kansas & Oklahoma Railroad, said that as the crew was doing an air test, they noticed an air hose cable holding up the chain brake, which was attached to the bleed-off lever. Anyone who tied the hand brake would cause air to bleed off the car. Corrective action was taken to prevent this from occurring again.

While Troy Kutella at the Wisconsin Rapids Railroad was riding a shove, he noticed a person near the tracks with her back to the team talking on their phone. When the locomotive got closer, she still hadn’t turned around and seemed unaware that they were coming. Troy stopped movement and let her know that when she was around the tracks, she needed to be aware and expect movement in any direction at any time.

John Ray, with the Louisiana Southern Railroad, noted that a customer’s tracks had drainage issues and were filled with water and were covering a detail. The team let the customer know about the problem so that it could be addressed and prevent an accident.

Mike Lawver, the mobile locomotive mechanic at Bayway and Ithaca Central Railroad, created aluminum trays to hand over the handrails of many of the locomotives he works on. "Having the tray allows tools and parts to be placed safely off of the walkway, at a convenient height reducing potential slip, trip, and fall injuries," said Lawver.

Johnny Rankin, Houston Material Handling, received his bonus for a good catch event. On Friday, February 7, at B-dock, Johnny moved the Fuchs 350 over to the grinding balls operation to assist Gulf Stream, as their crane was inoperable due to mechanical issues. He observed that the ground was uneven, slanted, and full of holes so he stopped operations and called his supervisor. A more suitable location was designated for the operations to ensure the crane could be operated safely.

Trevor Tamminen, of Sarnia, Canada, was changing over an empty bottle of nitrogen to the bottle rack and noticed that there was a full bottle of nitrogen in the breathing air spot. Someone not knowing the
Omaha mechanic treats team to lunch

On April 3, a Mexican food truck rolled into the Omaha, Nebraska, mechanical shop - courtesy of team member Dave Mathews.

Dave was a winner of the winter freeze bonus and he insisted that the money be used to buy lunch for the entire team.

Dave said he did it because, "Without the support of the entire team, I wouldn’t be able to do my job."

The Team Safety and Improvement Committee was given the donation and took the lead on planning the meal. The committee decided to change things up from the normal brats and burgers, and team member Carlos Arciga contacted the operators of a Mexican food truck about coming into the shop to feed the team. Normally they don’t visit locations with less than 50 employees but they made an exception for the shop, who had a little more than 30 people in that day.

John Livermore, environmental health and safety manager, said, "The team was so very grateful of Mr. Mathews' generosity and it was huge morale builder, not to mention delicious. Team Omaha is very lucky to have a group as tight as we all are!"

Baton Rouge team cleans up

by Cecelia Palermo
Administrative Assistant

When a contractor at the Baton Rouge Southern railroad was replaced by another company, the single-wide trailer that they used was hauled away. The trailer was right next to the one used by the Baton Rouge Southern Railroad and their deck porch area was a shared one. Once the trailer was taken away, the Baton Rouge team saw the first contractor had left behind trash and other items that could cause safety issues.

Senior Trainmaster Wayne Matthews, Sr, and Trainmaster Alvin Maney jumped in and took it upon themselves to straighten up the mess. The two picked up all of the trash and then pressure-washed the area to clean and sanitize it (and we know how important that is right now!).

While Matthews and Maney were cleaning, General Manager Brit Sonnier made his famous jambalaya for all team members to enjoy. It was so delicious that not a sliver of rice was left. Sonnier is a well-known cook; he used to own a restaurant.

Roadmaster Neal Ward also joined in the efforts. Neal laid out foundation dirt and then rock to make the area look finished and nice. He used some old railroad ties to finish the job off.

It really makes a difference as we’re pulling up to work and seeing the results of the hard work and dedication these guys put in for everyone to enjoy. We’re looking forward to getting some picnic tables set up in the area they fixed up.

Fryburg team loads 2,000th crude train

The Fryburg, North Dakota, terminal team completed the loading of their 2,000th crude train on April 2, 2020. There are 60 team members at the location, with about 80% of them traveling 300 miles each week to work at the facility.

Susan Karpyak, terminal manager, said, “They’re an incredibly remarkable team. We couldn’t have hit this mark without the team’s dedication to safety and their commitment to hard work.”

In addition to loading crude, the team has also loaded approximately 50 gas trains at the terminal.
The Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT) recently awarded two Watco short lines funds from the KDOT Rail Service Improvement Fund (RSIF) initiative.

KDOT asked the state’s short line railroads to submit projects that would help the state’s rail infrastructure reach the desired ability to handle 286,000 lbs. of rail cargo each day. The Kansas & Oklahoma Railroad (KO) was awarded $7.2 million from the state’s RSIF initiative to improve and enhance capacity to 286,000 lbs. on portions of the lines.

The KO was awarded $7.2 million from the state with a $2.7 million Watco match and the SKOL is receiving $6.4 million with a $2.4 million Watco match. The objective of the investment is to enhance track infrastructure to eliminate capacity inefficiencies and increase track speed from 10 mph to 25 mph in restricted areas. This will be achieved through upgrades to track structure and substructure such as rail, ties, ballast, surface, turnouts, and bridges.

Improvements will be made on portions of the SKOL in Kansas, from Elk Falls to Fredonia. A total of 42,895 ties will be replaced on the SKOL; 28,590 tons of ballast will be laid down; 12 crossings will be rehabbed; and six bridges upgraded.

On the KO, RSIF improvements will be made in Kansas on the 65-mile line running from Great Bend south to Wichita. The KO will replace 48,750 ties, lay down 32,500 tons of ballast, replace 20 crossings and repair five bridges.

Jason Danz, KO general manager, said, “We hope to be able to start work in May and are looking at approximately 90 days for completion. Of course, that’s dependent on many factors such as the weather, material availability, and contractor schedules. Our team is ready to go, though; they’re excited to begin moving at faster speeds and seeing quicker turnaround times for our customers.”

Besides boosting safety, these projects will improve and enhance trade opportunities and will have significant positive impacts on regional economic vitality, innovation, and performance while leveraging state and federal funds with private capital.
As much as the Watco team grows and offers new services, we’re still a family company at heart. The Neodesha, Kansas, mechanical shop is taking that philosophy literally. Over the last few months, the shop has hired three new railcar repairmen, and they’re all brothers.

The Wood brothers -- Brandon, Josh, and Kyle -- are all from nearby Fredonia, Kansas, and held other jobs in the area. When the Neodesha shop opened several positions in late 2019, Brandon found the posting on Indeed.com and decided to apply. He originally applied to be a blaster, using compressed air and small pieces of metal to remove the old paint from tank cars and prepare the surface for a fresh coat of paint. But the shop was in greater need of repairmen at the time.

“During my phone interview, the lady noticed I had a little bit of welding experience in the past and asked if I’d like to apply to be a repairman in the welding shop. I’m like, ‘Ok, that’s fine.’ So that’s how I landed this position,” Brandon said.

The brothers are close, so not long after he started, about four months ago, Brandon was telling Kyle about how much he liked working at the shop. Kyle was working for a nearby boat manufacturer, and after hearing from Brandon, he decided to apply as well.

Brandon said, “I enjoyed working here, so I decided to talk Kyle into it. I told him, ‘It’s more money, better hours, the guys I work with are pretty cool, and it’s more laid back here.’ So he came and applied, and they hired him. Then, we both kind of talked Josh into it.”

Josh is the oldest of the brothers and was working at a metal fabrication company in Fredonia. He says he heard his brothers bragging about their new jobs and that the shop was still looking for team members, so he decided to apply as well.

“My brothers can sometimes talk me into some things,” Josh laughed. “But this time, it sounded like a great opportunity. I have eight-month-old twins and another son under the age of three. For me, it was about taking care of my family, making sure they’re well provided for. It was also a great opportunity for me to learn a new trade, welding, that I can be proud of.”

He started March 9, 2020, and while he had a little welding knowledge, Josh is still in the training room. But it’s only a matter of time until he’s fully prepared to be out on the floor full-time. Brandon and Kyle both work the night shift at the shop.

“I’m glad I’m on nights. I’m usually a night owl anyway,” said Kyle. “I really enjoy it. Josh is still in the training room, working days, but I’m sure we’ll talk him into coming over to the dark side eventually.”

Josh was the only brother with rail experience before joining the Watco team. Watco acquired Millennium Rail in 2007, which included the Neodesha shop. Prior to the acquisition, Josh briefly worked at the shop cleaning railcars, but not performing repairs.

“I was in my early 20s when I worked briefly for Millennium Rail, but other than that, I didn’t have much knowledge about the industry,” Josh said. “Since coming back, I’ve enjoyed the people around me. They’re very knowledgeable, especially my teacher. He’s in there every day showing me the right techniques. I’ve been very happy here so far.”

The mechanical shops can get cold in the winter and warm during the summer. They haven’t experienced that heat aspect yet, but they’re ready for it.

“I love the environment and the people that I work with. They’re really relaxed and laid back, but we still get the job done. The supervisors, Dion (Wilkens, plant manager) - I think they’re all pretty cool,” Brandon said. “Sure, there are times that it sucks that it’s not a climate-controlled environment, but I like the atmosphere of being in an open shop and I enjoy welding.”

Safety is always a priority on the shop floor. The team is working with cutting torches, welders, grinders, and lifting 80,000-pound metal cylinders in the air. It’s a place where watching out for each other is required. The brothers agree that having family next to you helps drive that point home.

“When you work with your siblings, especially when you have a good relationship, it becomes a little easier mentally and a little bit more comfortable. Sometimes, it can also help motivate each other to push each other to be better,” Josh said.

“I wouldn’t say too much, Josh; you aren’t working with us yet,” Brandon laughed. “You’re gonna hate it.”

While they haven’t been part of the Watco team for long, Josh, Kyle, and Brandon have made an impression. In rural towns like Neodesha, it can be hard to find the right people. Wilkens and Plant Supervisor James Peck agree that, often, word of mouth is the best way to find new team members. In this case, the Wood brothers have been some of the best recruiters for the shop, and their supervisors say they’re doing a great job. That’s because this is an ideal opportunity for all of them, especially in the current climate.

“For me, this job been a load off my mind with this coronavirus stuff going around. This is a job where you don’t have to worry about being laid off in situations like this. Our boss told us how essential we really are. I’m grateful that I don’t have to worry about losing my job right now, and we can provide for our families,” said Josh. “It’s one of those trades that I’ve always wanted to learn, and I’ve been given this opportunity, so I’m going to push as hard as I can to be great at it,” Josh said.

“Absolutely,” his brothers agreed.

Brandon Wood, center, joined the team at the Neodesha mechanical shop in late 2019. Within a few months he had recruited his brothers Kyle, left, and Josh, right.

Winter Freeze bonuses

Continued from page 2 – difference in bottles or not paying attention and hooking up the incorrect bottle could be hazardous. The bottle was moved and the incident was discussed to prevent it from happening again.

Tom Morrison, also from the Sarnia mechanical shop, stated that while performing switch operations into their repair shop, they have outstanding safety procedures that they follow. The brakeman walks the line informing all people in the shop, there are pylons with blinking lights on top by all doors, and a horn is sounded throughout the shop to warn that a switch is in process. However, when switching occurs at the cleaning rack or inspection line, there isn’t much warning of a switch. They have communication with directly involved team members, and the rail king sounds its horn, but there is no way to protect or warn team members or contractors that come to the shop. Tom suggested getting a visual alarm to warn people of the switch, similar to what is used at the doors of the shop.

Thanks to all of our team members who are safely taking care of our customers and working to improve safety every day.
Congratulations to the following team members celebrating April anniversaries.


2 Years: Alan Andrade, Tiljuanna Barrow, David Bayles, Christina Bell, Nick Bone, Taylor Brewer, Zackery Brock, Justin Broussard, Danielle Bushore, Esmeralda Carrazales, Chad Combs, Justen Combs, Anthony DellaSega, Jonathan Dochniak, Abram Dudley, Christopher Fox, Justin Gallegos, Drew Grogan, Dale Heisler, Ronald Henderson, Gary Henry, Stephanie Hickey, Naoe Ibarra, Gilbert Jasso, Napolian Jenkins, Joel Johnson, Brandon Landelius, Dominque Lewis, Terry Madison, Jacey Minkler, Michael Moore, Ricardo Morales, Derek Morris, Alex Myers, Christopher Odom, Abhiose Okoiron, Miguel Ornelas, Brian Orr, Julie Ortiz, Jesus Pacheco, Brian Payne, Nathaniel Pellerin, Curtis Phlegm, Travis Pinkerton, Delbert Reece, Anibal Rodriguez Santiago, Ruben Ross, Roberto Salamanca, Jacob Spruiell, Channing Stackhouse, Jessica Sutton, Misty Sweeney, Brent Taylor, Dexter Trammell, Craig Turner, Chad VanSickle, Justin Vazquez, Harry Victor, Christopher Wilson, Robert Woodard


4 Years: David Ault, Brian Baughner, David Dust, Matthew Gibson, Jeremy Lee, Ramiro Mansilla-Quintana, Phillip Miller, Richard Morgan, Elvin Rivera, Christopher Salazar, Marvin Serrano Chavez, Ronald Tucker, William Welch, Joseph White


6 Years: Austin Berkeley, Marcus Blumer, Eric Cummins, Crystal Henigan, Alifie Hutchinson, Jaden Jacobs, Kersy Johnson, Tracie Kent, David McIntosh, Donna Moore, Paul Muzik, William Newport, Theodore Nicholson, Michael Porter, Dustin Schilling, Lawrence Spierer, Chad Stacy, Aaron Tanner, Adam York

7 Years: Michael Crosslin, Justin Denton, Michael Ebarb, John Honaker, Devan Lynch, Quinceh Marshall, Jacob Nance, Mark Perry, Kyle Raillif, Bill Rollins, Steven Schadler, Jennifer Sealey, John Shealey, Noey Sistos, Robert Sohmer, Donna Stonson, Terri Turiano, Chase Upholt, Nicholas Wayman

8 Years: Scott Ayers, Willie Carson, David Garcia, Aaron Greene, Charles Hall, Justin Hayes, Stefan Holcomb, William King, James Latham, Joseph Mays, Jeff Mitchell, Michael Maliniz, Patrick Stout, Andrew Thompson, Mark Wells, Tirus White, Jeremy Williams, Tracy Wright

9 Years: Mark Adams, Joshua Altis, Christa Coates, Douglas Deleboy, Allen Hasty, Axel Herrera, Brian Hickerson, Shaun Hines, Christopher Kachmar, Matthew Parker, Zachery Pittman, Dustin Rhoades, Donald Robert, Gerald Tjepkema, Megan Wilson

10 Years: Hayley Becker, Randall Bennett, William Casey, Jennifer Coursey, Kevin Crespo, Anthony Hyote, Jordan Merritt, Jackie Ogden, Rachael Peterson, David Riley, Kevin Roth, Owen Schulz, Andrew Smith, Roidino Trevino

11 Years: Angela Bunker, Joseph Grupczynski, Mark Moorlag, Michelle Murphy

12 Years: Kimmie Bundy, Carl Elrod, Steven Everett, Chris Haddock, Russell Hamm, Robert Hurda, Jose Martinez, Arnoldo Sandoval, Eric Smith

13 Years: Joel Aguilar, Rebekah Gardner, Danny Rodriguez

14 Years: Marshall Blakley, Shellee Currier, Timothy Dunn, Cody Gilliland, Christopher Preuc

15 Years: John Bell, Jerad Brunskill, Brandon Edelman, Travis Fellers, Brian Fox, Claudia Gedeon, Timothy Hurse, Richard Moser, Jesus Rodriguez, Jessica Seelinger, Travis Tholen, Tracie VanBeelaere, Patrick White, David Wilczewski, David Witzack

16 Years: Jeffery Greenwood, Gina Lambert, Jason Nix

17 Years: Shane Engle, George Karmoukos

18 Years: Lisa Butts, Pat Cedeno, Jason Ebarb, John Galloway, Darren McComic, Kenneth Sauter, Joe Watts

20 Years: Ralph Fielder, Jeanne Housel, William Kyzer, Byron Marshall, Ernest Palmer

21 Years: Marvin Ellis

22 Years: James Crider, Stacy Hurda

23 Years: Brandy Cathey, Sherry Den, Jeremy Findlay, Alfonso Orta

24 Years: Kenneth Barber, Antonio Medrano

25 Years: Aaron Byle

27 Years: Neal Jacobs

28 Years: Condra Warhurst

29 Years: Gary Cooley

30 Years: Dennis Phelps

31 Years: Dwight Browning

37 Years: Michael Murphy, James Strawn

38 Years: Larry Vail, Djon Wilkens

39 Years: Joe Watts

42 Years: Robert Neal

Abel Daniel Harkness

Daniel and Gina Harkness welcomed a son, Abel Daniel, to the family on February 18, 2020. Abel weighed 9 lbs., and was 20 inches long.

Daniel is the terminal manager at the Tioga terminal in North Dakota.